

PATENT APPLICATION

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TITLE OF INVENTION

TWO-DIMENSIONAL GIMBALED SCANNING ACTUATOR WITH VERTICAL ELECTROSTATIC COMB-DRIVE FOR ACTUATION AND/OR SENSING

INVENTORS

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This application is a related to the following copending U.S. provisional applications, which are herein incorporated by reference: Provisional Application 60/191,987 "Two-Dimensional Scanning Actuator with Vertical Electrostatic Comb Drive Actuation and/or Sensing" of Behrang Behin, Michael J. Daneman, Meng H. Kiang, Kam Y. Lau, and Satinderpall Pannu; Provisional Application 60/191,856, "Self-Aligned Comb-Drive Actuators" of Behrang Behin and Satinderpall Pannu; Provisional Application 60/192,097 "Multi-Layer, Self-Aligned Vertical Comb-Drive Electrostatic Actuators and Fabrication Methods" of Behrang Behin and Satinderpall Pannu.

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

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This invention relates generally to microactuators. More particularly, it relates to two-dimensional gimbaled scanning actuators with vertical comb-drives for actuation and/or sensing.

BACKGROUND ART

Microelectromechanical system (MEMS) fabricated using silicon integrated circuit processing techniques have been developed for a wide variety of applications that require actuation and/or

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sensing of microstructures. The electrostatic comb-drive structure has become an integrated component in many of these MEMS device. A vertical comb-drive device can be used to generate an actuating force on a suspended structure as a bias voltage is applied. This force can be used to actuate microstructures out of the plane in which they were made.

Electrostatically actuated gimbaled two-dimensional actuators have previously employed an electrostatic gap-actuator design shown in Fig. 1. As shown in Fig. 1, a gimbaled electrostatic-gap actuator **100** consists of a base **102**, an outer frame **104**, and an inner part **108**. The outer frame **104** is attached to a base **102** by a first pair of torsional flexures **106**. The inner part **108** is attached to the outer frame **104** by a second pair of torsional flexures **110** positioned at a perpendicular angle relative to the first pair of torsional flexures **106**. The gimbaled electrostatic-gap actuator **100** is suspended over a set of electrodes **112**, and the angle of the gimbaled electrostatic-gap actuator **100** is adjusted by applying a voltage difference between the electrodes **112** and the suspended actuator **100**. The gimbaled electrostatic-gap actuator requires a high voltage to achieve a significant angular deflection. Furthermore, the angle versus applied voltage characteristics of this structure are very nonlinear because the gap between the electrodes **112** and the suspended actuator **100** changes as the angle of the actuator is varied, and the electrostatic force between the electrodes **112** and the suspended actuator **100** has a nonlinear dependence on the gap. In fact, gap-closing actuators with linear restoring springs typically have a 'snap-in' instability point at approximately one-third of the full range of motion of the actuator. In addition, the two perpendicular axes of rotation can not be independently controlled since adjusting one axis changes the electrostatic gap associated with the other.

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This cross-axis dependence makes control of such structures difficult.

In the electrostatic gap-actuator structure of the prior art,
5 the capacitance between the electrodes **112** and the suspended
actuator **100** can be measured in order to monitor the position of
the actuator. However, since the gap between the electrodes **112**
and the suspended actuator **100** must be fairly large in order to
allow for a large angular deflection, this capacitance is very
10 small, and the accuracy of the capacitive measurement is very
poor.

Vertical electrostatic comb-drive actuators have been employed
15 to make one-dimensional rotational scanners. Electrostatic
comb-drive actuators allow for exertion of a greater force over
a large range by increasing the effective overall capacitive gap
area. Furthermore, they allow for a more linear angle versus
applied voltage relationship since the capacitive overlap area
between the opposing electrodes depends almost linearly on the
angle of the actuator, and the gap between the opposing
electrodes remains fairly constant over the entire actuation
range. Vertical electrostatic comb-drive actuators, which are
shown in Figs. 2A-B, have been used to produce one dimensional
rotating mirror structures with significantly lower actuation
voltages than required for electrostatic gap actuators as
described in Fig. 1. Fig. 2A is a plan view of one-dimensional
vertical comb-drive actuator **200** without applied voltage. The
device **200** includes a base **202** and a mirror **204** attached to the
base **202** by a pair of torsional flexures **206**. Two vertical
30 electrostatical comb-drive actuators containing movable comb
fingers **208** and fixed comb fingers **210** are fixed to the base **202**
and the mirror **204** such that the degree of engagement, or the
overlap area, between the interdigitated comb fingers depends on
the angle between the base **202** and the mirror **204**. Fig. 2B is a

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plan view of the device illustrated in Fig. 2A with an applied voltage. As shown in Fig. 2B, applying a voltage to the actuators attracts the moving comb fingers **208** to the fixed comb fingers **210**, which exert a torque on the mirror **204** and cause
5 the mirror **204** to rotate about an axis **212**.

The capacitive coupling between the moving comb fingers **208** and the stationary comb fingers **210** can be measured in order to monitor the angle of the mirror **204**. Since the capacitance is
10 fairly large, known methods can be employed to measure the capacitance with a high degree of accuracy. Similarly, comb-drives can be used for capacitive sensing only in a one-dimensional rotational actuator that employs another method of actuation (i.e. electrostatic gap-closing, magnetic).

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15 U.S. Pat. No. 5,648,618 issued Jul. 15, 1997 to Neukermans et al., discloses a micromachined gimbaled actuator. An outer silicon frame oscillates around a first pair of bar shaped hinges by electrostatic or magnetic force. One end of each hinge of the first pair of hinges attaches to an inner frame, which attaches to a fixed inner post by a second pair of bar shaped torsion hinges positioned at right angles to the first set of hinges. The first and second pairs of bar shaped torsion hinges are made of single crystal silicon. First and second
20 four-point piezoresistive strain sensors are built in the first and second pair of hinges for measuring the torsion displacement of the hinges. This apparatus does not posses several of the advantages gained by using comb-drive actuators and sensors, including linear behavior, low-voltage operation, and
25 integration of the actuator and sensor in one structure.
30 Furthermore, previous gimbaled structures have only employed lateral comb-drive actuators for in-plane motion.

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There is a need, therefore, for an improved two-dimensional gimbaled scanner with out-of-plane rotational motion that provides linear drive and sense capabilities, low-voltage operation, and potential integration of the drive and sense mechanisms.

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OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES

Accordingly, it is a primary object of the present invention to provide a gimbaled two-dimensional scanner, which contains vertical comb-drives that are used for actuation, for sensing,
10 or for both actuation and sensing.

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It is a further object of the present invention to provide a gimbaled two-dimensional scanner with vertical comb-drive actuators, which has two independently controlled axes of rotation.

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SUMMARY

These objects and advantages are attained by two-dimensional scanners containing vertical comb-drive actuators.

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A two-dimensional scanner according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention consists of a rotatable gimbal structure containing a base, an outer frame, and an inner part. The outer frame is attached to the base by a first pair of torsional flexures that allow the outer frame to rotate about a first axis. The inner part is attached to the outer frame by a second pair of torsional flexures that allow the inner part rotate about a second axis. The inner part may include a reflective surface such as a mirror. The scanner further includes one or more vertical electrostatic comb-drive actuators positioned between the outer frame and the base, and between the inner part and the outer frame. Voltages are applied to the comb-drive actuators to allow the inner part to rotate about two axes. The voltages across the two pairs of comb-drives are adjusted to

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control the angle between the outer frame and the base, and angle between the inner part and the outer frame. Since the capacitance of the comb-drives depends on the degree to which they are engaged, the capacitance is measured to sense the angular positions of the inner part and the outer frame. The capacitive angle signals are used in servo loops to actively control the positions of the inner part and the outer frame.

Two-dimensional scanners having features in common with the two-dimensional scanner as described in above embodiment are used to produce fiber-optic switches that switch light between optical fibers.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

15 Fig. 1 is the view of a gimbaled electrostatic-gap actuator of the prior art;

Fig. 2A is a plan view of one-dimensional vertical comb-drive actuator without any applied bias voltage of the prior art;

20 Fig. 2B is a plan view of one-dimensional vertical comb-drive actuator illustrated in Fig. 2A with applied bias of the prior art;

Fig. 3 is a plan view of a gimbaled two-dimensional scanner with vertical comb-drive actuators according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

25 Fig. 4 depicts a fiber-optic switch containing gimbaled two-dimensional scanners; and

Figs. 5A-5H depict cross-sectional schematic diagrams illustrating fabrication of a comb-drive structure according to an embodiment of the present invention.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Although the following detailed description contains many specifics for the purposes of illustration, anyone of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that many variations and

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alterations to the following details are within the scope of the invention. Accordingly, the following preferred embodiment of the invention is set forth without any loss of generality to, and without imposing limitations upon, the claimed invention.

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A gimbaled two-dimensional scanner with vertical electrostatic comb-drive actuators for rotational actuation and/or sensing is shown in Fig. 3 according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. As shown in Fig. 3, two-dimensional scanner 10 300 includes a base 302, an outer frame 304 attached to the base 302 by a first pair of torsional flexures 310, and an inner part 306 attached to the outer frame 304 by a second pair of torsional flexures 308. The first pair of torsional flexures 310 allows the outer frame 304 to rotate about a first axis 326 that is substantially parallel to a plane containing the base 302 and the outer frame 304. The second pair of torsional flexures 308 allows the inner part 306 to rotate about a second axis 324 that is substantially parallel to a plane containing the outer frame 304 and the inner part 306. The first axis 326 may be substantially perpendicular to the second axis 324. The base 302, the outer frame 304, and the inner part 306 may be coplanar, however this need not be the case. The inner part 306 may include a reflective surface such as a mirror. The torsional flexures 308 and 310 may be replaced by a combination of cantilever-like flexures, serpentine flexures, and pin-and-staple type hinges.

The scanner 300 includes two vertical electrostatic comb-structures. For example a set of movable comb fingers 318 may 30 be attached to the inner part 306 and an interdigitating set of fixed comb fingers 316 may be attached to the outer frame 304. Fixed comb fingers 316 are fixed relative to the outer frame 304 but can move relative to the base 302 by virtue of the outer frame 304 moving relative to the base 302. Alternatively, the

comb structure may include a set of movable comb fingers 314 attached to the outer frame 304 that interdigitate with a set of fixed comb fingers 312 may be attached to the base 302. The comb fingers 312, 314, 316, 318 may be of the type shown in Fig. 5 2A-B. Either or both of the comb structures defined by the comb fingers 312, 314, 316, 318 may be used as comb-drive actuators. In this example, applying a voltage V_x from a source 320 between the movable comb fingers 318 and the fixed comb fingers 316 attracts the movable comb fingers 318 to the fixed comb fingers 10 316, which exerts a torque on the inner part 306 and causes the inner part 306 to rotate about a second axis 324. In a similar fashion, applying another voltage V_y from another source 322 between the movable comb fingers 314 and the fixed comb fingers 312 attracts the movable comb fingers 314 to the fixed comb fingers 15 312, which exerts a torque on the outer frame 304 and causes the outer frame 304 to rotate about the first axis 326. The inner part 306 may rotate about the first axis 326 along with the outer frame. The applied voltages V_x and V_y from the sources 320 and 322 may be adjusted to independently control the angle between the outer frame 304 and the base 302, and the angle between the inner part 306 and the outer frame 304.

Furthermore, either or both of the comb structures defined by the comb fingers 312, 314, 316, 318 may be used as sensors to measure an angle of rotation. For example, the capacitance between the fixed and movable comb fingers can generally be measured to monitor the angular positions of the inner part 306 and the outer frame 304 since the capacitance of the comb fingers 316 and 318, or 312 and 314 depend on the degree to 20 25 which they are engaged. Therefore, capacitance across the comb fingers 316 and 318, or 312 and 314 may be used to sense the angular position of the inner part 306 with respect to the outer frame 304 and the angular position of the outer frame 304 with respect to the base 302. For example capacitance sensors 332 30

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and **334** may be electrically coupled to the comb fingers **312** and **316** respectively. The capacitive position monitoring signals from the sensors **332**, **334** may be used to implement closed-loop feedback control on the angles of the inner part **306** and the outer frame **304** via the controllers **336**, **338**. The controllers **336**, **338** may be used to implement a servo loop for active control of the angle of the outer frame **304** and the inner part **306**.

10 In the example described above, the comb-drive structures including of comb-finger pairs **312** and **314** or **316** and **318** are used both as actuators and sensors. Alternately, either or both of the comb-drive structures may be used as actuators only or as sensors only.

If any or all of the comb fingers 312, 314, 316, 318 are used as sensors, the scanner 300 may include alternative means for actuating the inner part 306 and/or the outer frame 304. Such means may include, but are not limited to gap-closing electrodes, piezo drives, magnetic drives, or a second set of comb-drives. Magnetic drives include use of a magnetic material on the moving part of the actuator along with an apparatus that provides a variable magnetic field. Magnetic drives further include use of a current-carrying element (e.g. a coil) on the moving part of the actuator along with an apparatus that provides an external magnetic field. In the case that any of the comb fingers 312, 314, 316, 318 are used only as sensors, these comb fingers may either be fabricated so that the pairs of opposing comb fingers 312 and 314, or 316 and 318 are vertically offset in their rest position (as shown in **Fig. 2A**), or they may be fabricated so that the pairs of opposing comb fingers are substantially engaged or interdigitated in their rest position, as occurs when the fingers are fabricated from a single layer.

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If any or all of the comb fingers **312**, **314**, **316**, **318** are used as comb-drive actuators, the scanner **300** may include alternative means for sensing the position of the inner part **306** and/or the outer frame **304**. Such means may include, but are not limited to
5 gap-closing electrodes, piezo-resistive sensors, or a second set of comb-drives that are used for sensing only. The second set of comb fingers may either be fabricated so that the pairs of opposing comb fingers **312** and **314**, or **316** and **318** are vertically offset in their rest position (as shown in **Fig. 2A**), or they may
10 be fabricated so that the pairs of opposing comb fingers are substantially engaged or interdigitated in their rest position, as occurs when the fingers are fabricated from a single layer.

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All components of two-dimensional scanner **300** are typically made of silicon, silicon nitride, silicon oxide, silicon-germanium, nickel, chromium or gold. The two-dimensional scanner **300** may be fabricated using many different processes, including but not limited to a combination of Si surface-micromachining, Si-bulk micromachining, electroforming of high aspect-ratio features, HEXSIL, and LIGA. Vertical comb-drive actuators of two-dimensional scanner **300** may be fabricated using a semiconductor process disclosed in an article entitled "A Flat High-Frequency Scanning Micromirror" to Conant et al. issued by Hilton Head 2000 and incorporated herein by reference.

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The fixed comb fingers **312** may be substantially co-planar with the movable comb fingers **314**. Both sets of comb fingers **312**, **314** may be fabricated in a single layer of a substrate as a self aligned comb structure. The design of the self-aligned comb structure containing the comb fingers **312**, **314** may be such that in a nominal state the two sets of comb fingers substantially interdigitate according to a predetermined engagement. A biasing element (e.g., a magnetic material) may be attached to the outer frame **304**. When subject to an external biasing force
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(e.g., due to a magnetic field), the biasing element causes the outer frame along with the movable comb fingers **314** to undergo an angular displacement from the initial engagement with respect to the base **302**. A voltage between the stationary comb fingers **312** and the movable comb fingers **314** may then cause the movable comb fingers **314** along with the outer frame **304** to rotate back toward the initial engagement in a predetermined manner. In a like fashion, the fixed comb fingers **316** may be substantially co-planar with the movable comb fingers **318** and fabricated from the same layer of material to form a self-aligned comb structure. An external biasing force may be applied to the inner part **306** to rotate it out of plane with respect to the outer frame **304**. Other implementations may employ an elastic force or an electrostatic force provided by gap-closing actuators to provide the biasing force. One-dimensional actuators may be constructed with comb drives of this type. These actuators provide the advantage of a single-layer comb-drive structure that is used for both actuation and sensing.

Two-dimensional scanners having features in common with the two-dimensional scanners described in above embodiment may be used to produce fiber-optic switches that switch light between optical fibers. A fiber-optic switch may include one or more mirror arrays, and each array may contain one or more two-dimensional scanners. In Fig. 4, only two mirror arrays are shown for the sake of simplicity. Furthermore, the arrays are shown as linear arrays (e.g. a 1x4 array of mirrors), whereas they may be two-dimensional (e.g. a 4x4 array of mirrors) in a practical application. As shown in Fig. 4, a fiber-optic switch **400** includes an array of input fibers **402** terminated with microlenses **403** and a first array of scanning mirrors **404** positioned such that the first arrays **404** intercept beams **410** emerging from the array of input fibers **402** and microlenses **403**. The first array of scanning mirrors **404** allows the beams **412**,

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which emerge from this array of scanning mirrors, to be steered individually. The fiber-optic switch **400** also includes a second array of scanning mirrors **406** positioned such that the second array of scanning mirrors **406** intercept beams **412** emerging from the first array of scanning mirrors **404**. The second array of scanning mirror **406** allows beams **414**, which emerge from this second array of scanning mirrors, to be steered individually. The fiber-optic switch **400** further includes an array of output fibers **408** terminated with microlenses **409** for coupling the beams **414** emerging from the second array of scanning mirrors **406**. Alternatively, large arrays of two-dimensional scanners may be used to produce large port-count fiber-optic switches. The first and/or second scanning mirror arrays contain mirrors mounted to two-dimensional scanners of the type shown and described with respect to Fig. 3.

Furthermore, two-dimensional scanners described in the preferred embodiment have a broad range of uses including biomedical device applications, and optical devices for tracking, display, and telecommunication applications. For example, such a two-dimensional scanner may be employed to scan a modulated laser beam in order to project an image onto a screen to produce a display.

25 Two-dimensional MEMS scanners of the type described above may be
fabricated using conventional semiconductor processing steps,
such as photolithographic, deposition, and isotropic and
anisotropic etching techniques. When fabricating the comb
structures, it is desirable to electrically insulate the fixed
30 comb structures, e.g. 312, 316 from the corresponding movable
comb structures, e.g. 314, 318, in order to be able to apply a
voltage between them. This typically involves the fabrication
of a suspended structure with portions that are mechanically
attached but electrically insulated. Such structures may be

fabricated using methods set forth in U.S. Patent Application 09/712,420.

A process for fabricating a suspended gimbaled structure with
5 multi-layer comb-drives that are mechanically coupled but
electrically isolated is shown in Figs. 5A-5H. Figs. 5A-5H
show a sequence of simplified schematic cross-sections
representing the process described below.

10 In Fig. 5A, the process starts with a substrate 501 having a device layer 502 disposed on an intermediate layer 504, which is disposed on a substrate layer 506. Preferably, the device layer 502 and intermediate layer 504 are composed of different materials, such that the intermediate layer 504 may act as an etch-stop for etching of the device layer 502. For example, the substrate may be a silicon-on-insulator (SOI) wafer, which is composed of a Si device layer 502, a silicon-oxide intermediate layer 504, and a silicon substrate layer 506. The device layer 502 may alternatively be the substrate itself, or a layer of device material such as silicon or silicon-oxide deposited on top of a substrate. In that case, the substrate is preferably composed of a material other than that of the device layer, such that it may act as an etch-stop.

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25 The device layer 502 is patterned to define one or more features, e.g. using a standard photoresist. The features are then etched to form one or more narrow trenches 508 in the device layer 502, as shown in Fig. 5A. The trenches 508 may penetrate into the intermediate layer 504 and/or the substrate layer 506. The trenches 508 are then completely filled with an etch-stop material 510 to form one or more filled trenches 512. The etch-stop material may also be deposited on top of the device layer 502. Suitable etch-stop materials include silicon nitride, polycrystalline silicon, silicon dioxide, tungsten,

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etc. or a combination of the above, depending on the composition of the device layer. The etch-stop material is typically deposited using chemical vapor deposition. Alternatively, sputtering or electroplating may be used to 5 deposit the etch-stop material **510**. The etch-stop material completely fills the trenches **508**, forming the filled trenches **512**. The etch-stop material **510** may be also deposited over a surface of the device layer **502**, which would typically happen in the same deposition step. Alternatively, a separate 10 deposition may be required for this.

In the example where SOI is used as the starting material, the 15 trenches **508** are etched using deep-Si etching techniques, and filled with CVD oxide (e.g. TEOS) or thermal oxide, which also coats the surface of the device layer. Proper design of the pattern of filled trenches **512** creates portions of device layer material that are enclosed by the material in the filled trenches on the sides, the material of the intermediate layer on the bottom surface, and the material deposited during the 20 trench-fill process on the top surface of the device layer.

At this point the surface of the device layer **502** is largely planar and any further processing may be performed using standard semiconductor processes. Also, since the etch-stop material may be deposited at high temperature, further high-temperature processing is not prevented. 25

Selected portions of the etch-stop material **510** are removed to expose selected portions of the device layer **502**, as shown in 30 Fig. **5D**. Structural features **522**, such as comb fingers, are then formed on the exposed portions of the device layer **502**. Alternatively, the structural features **522** may also be formed directly on top of the etch-stop material **510**. The structural features **522** are typically made of a material that is different

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from the etch-stop material **510**. Alternatively, the features **522** may be formed from the same material, but in a later deposition step. The structural features **522** may be formed from a patterned structural layer containing multiple sub-layers of material. The structural features **522** are secured to the device layer **502** at some point or points outside the plane of the drawing in Figs. **5A-5H**.

Since, preferably, different parts of the gimbaled comb-structure are insulated from each other, it is important that the structural features **522** can be connected to the device layer **502** with both an insulating and a conductive contact. There are several ways to achieve both insulating and conductive contacts between the structural features **522** and the device layer **502**. For example, an insulating layer, such as silicon-nitride, may be deposited and patterned on the surface of the device layer **502** before any processing is done (**Fig. 5A**). Contacts between the structural layer, i.e. the layer containing the structural features **522**, and the device layer **502** can be made conductive or insulating by patterning the insulating layer so that it remains or does not remain on the contact area. Alternatively, an insulating layer may be deposited and patterned after the selective exposure of the device layer material (**Fig. 5D**), so that subsequently deposited structural features **522** make contact either directly to the device layer **502** or to the insulating layer deposited on top of the device layer.

Once all processing of the structural features **522** has been performed, the etch-stop layer can be patterned to expose the device layer in appropriate places as shown in Fig. **5E**. Alternately, a photoresist layer may be deposited and patterned in order to expose the device layer in the appropriate places. Next, an isotropic etch of the device layer is performed as

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shown in Fig. 5F. The isotropic etch may be a wet etch process or dry etch process or some combination of both. The isotropic etch removes exposed portions of the device layer 502 material but not the etch-stop material 510, the structural features 522, or portions of the device layer that are protected by the etch-stop material 510, structural features 522, or photoresist layer. The isotropic etch undercuts and releases the structural features 522 that were on top of the device layer 502. The etch process is contained by the etch-stop material 510 in the filled trenches 512, thereby controlling the width of the undercut. The cavity created underneath the structural features 522 allows the top combs (formed in the structural layer) to swing down and interdigitate with the bottom combs (formed in the device layer).

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At this point, the comb-fingers have been formed, and the gimbal structure may be released so that it can rotate freely. The first part of the release involves creation of a cavity in the substrate layer **506**, as shown in Fig. **5G**. The cavity can be formed by patterning and etching the substrate layer from the backside. As shown in Fig. **5H**, the final step in this process is a timed etch of the intermediate layer and the trench-fill layer (if necessitated by the design) in order to release the structures and allow them to move. The final device consists of a suspended gimbaled structure with multi-layer comb-drives and portions that are mechanically coupled but electrically isolated.

Other methods exist for fabricating two-dimensional gimbaled structures with comb-drives. For example, where the comb structures are to be vertically offset from each other in their rest position, as shown in Fig. 2A, the stationary and moving comb structures may be simultaneously fabricated from a single substrate using a self aligned technique as described in cross-

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referenced application 60/192,097. The self-aligned fabrication method typically involves the steps of providing a multi-layer structure having first and second conductive layers separated by an insulating layer, and etching a top pattern in the first and 5 second conductive layers and insulating layer to define the moving and stationary comb fingers. The substrate may also have additional layers that are etched to define the bottom surfaces of the fingers. Because the fingers are fabricated together, the difficult alignment of the moving and stationary fingers, 10 required for fabricating conventional vertical comb-drive actuators, may be avoided. Alignment is a direct result of the mask used in fabrication. Electrical conduction between the different layers in this structure may be achieved by etching narrow trenches vertically through multiple layers and filling 15 the trenches with electrically conductive material.

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In structures where the fixed and moving combs interdigitate in their rest positions, both the moving and fixed comb fingers may be fabricated in the same step from the same layer of device material by a single patterning and etching step. It is important to insulate the comb drives from each other so that they can support a voltage difference and therefore be used for sensing and/or actuating. This can be achieved by etching narrow trenches in the layer from which the comb-fingers and the gimbaled structure has been fabricated, and filling these 20 trenches with insulating material. The insulating material mechanically attaches the structural material on either side of the trench, while keeping them electrically isolated.

25 30 It will be clear to one skilled in the art that the above embodiment may be altered in many ways without departing from the scope of the invention.